

Act 1
Scene 1

(Lights rise. Hilary enters.)

Hilary: **(Puts her file on a table. Faces audience. Big smile)** A big thank you for putting your trust in me again. I can't express enough how much I value your confidence in me at the ballot box. For ten years now I've been your Independent Member of Parliament for Smallbury, and I think I can safely say that I know all the nooks and crannies, as well as most of the crooks and grannies, in the area. **(Smiles condescendingly and pauses.)** One of my promises was to cut crime, making Smallbury a no-go zone for criminals. We still have some way to go, but I will persevere with zeal. Crime is the scourge of civilised society. We want to leave our Husqvarna P525D, Diesel ride on lawn mowers in our front gardens without them getting filched. We want to wear our Dior wristbands without getting mugged. We want to leave our MacBook Pro in Gold in our front bay windows without being snatched. We want to leave our Lamborghini Venenos on our drives without being driven away. We want to lower our insurance premiums! **(Pause)** To this end I was instrumental in obtaining funding for another Special Community Police Officer. As wealthy taxpayers we contribute massively to the financial purse of the nation. We help fund the NHS, Schools, Welfare, Roads, Police, and we should be looked after. No-one cares for us. We're the most uncared for group in society. If we don't care for ourselves, no one else does.

(Bernard enters with a clutch of papers)

Hilary: Those who haven't voted for me, I will still try and serve you as well. **(Smiles and looks round at Bernard)** Of which I'm pleased to say are in the minority.

(Bernard claps rather slowly)

Hilary: I'm rehearsing my acceptance speech.

Bernard: I only caught the end bit. Isn't it the same acceptance speech as last time Hilary?

Hilary: Why waste it? You're always rabbiting on about waste. Anyway no-one will contest the seat. No-one we need to worry about that is.

Bernard: Well it is the safest seat, and the smallest seat in the country. But we shouldn't count our chickens. We don't know yet that it won't be contested.

Hilary: The two idiots who ran against me last time lost their deposits. The 'Buried in Wool Party' and the 'Bring Back Hedges' party. I ask you! Have you ever heard such utter -

Bernard: **(Interrupts)** The 'Buried in Wool' was quite an interesting idea. Takes its name from a 17th century Act of Parliament requiring everyone, except Plague victims and the destitute, to be buried in English wool. It was to protect the British wool trade.

Hilary: Thank you Bernard. I'd love to be buried in a liberty bodice. And I rather doubt there's any wool trade left.

Bernard: Sadly, I think you're right.

Hilary: People don't understand the countryside. It's changed, moved on, evolved. People here make their money in the city. It's more 'Country Living' than 'Farmers Weekly'. Less chickens, mud, muck, visible animals, and The Archers; more 4 wheel drives, and cocktail parties in farmhouse kitchens

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Bernard: Smallbone farmhouse kitchens?

Hilary: This would a perfect small town if only (**sighs**) –

Bernard: Dingwell?

Hilary: Such a pretty name.

Bernard: Originally an estate for agricultural workers. The Lord of the Manor kept them busy. I blame the Industrial Revolution. Farm machinery and all that. Shire horses are almost extinct.

Hilary: Now a den of sin and slovenliness. If only Dingwell could be relocated somewhere else. Shunted across the electoral boundary.

Bernard: Gerrymandering.

Hilary: Well Gerry, whoever he was, got it right.

Bernard: It's illegal.

Hilary: More's the pity.

Bernard: (**Ruefully**) Now the farmers have taken out the hedges they just run their ploughs and harvesters up and down without the need of workers. Hedging and ditching has gone. Shepherding, pig keeping, street sweeping - even the library's run by volunteers.

Hilary: I didn't know they kept pigs in libraries.

Bernard: As we've got richer, we've done people out of the jobs their ancestors have done for generations.

Hilary: Only the people who haven't evolved Bernard. Only the people who haven't adapted. Only the people who don't matter.

Bernard: (**Bites lip**) Employment. You could say something about employment; training, job opportunities. If people are in employment Hilary, they have less need to nick things.

Hilary: What sort of employment? There's nothing round here. True we could do with another butler, ours is about 100, and becoming very forgetful. There's housekeeping and cleaning I suppose. But we get agency people in. Would

you trust a resident of Dingwell in your home? They'd probably have purloined the bricks by the time you got home.

Bernard: That's another interesting thing. It's called quarrying. Carting away stones from one building and using them for another. The villagers used to do that to old castles. Oliver Cromwell knocked them about a bit, but it was the villagers who pinched the stone. Recycling really. Waste not, want not.

Hilary: Bernard, I don't want a history lesson – and don't bring up that old chestnut about an industrial unit. I can see it quivering on your lips.

Bernard: It could be tucked somewhere out of sight.

Hilary: I do not want to ride my horse past an industrial unit. Grey.

Bernard: The units don't have to be that colour.

Hilary: My horse is a grey.

Bernard: Ah.

Hilary: I have tried you know. I have tried to do my duty. But the people in Dingwell just shut their doors in my face. And they don't come to my surgeries.

Bernard: Except for Pauline Payne.

Hilary: Please don't mention Pauline Payne. I need a large Easy Pomegranate Margarita after a run in with her.

Bernard: Hilary, you need to put something in your speech about green issues. Pauline Payne may be an old hippie, but her suggestions are in line with today's thinking.

Hilary: Exchanging cars for horses and carts?

Bernard: That's going back a bit far. She's rather extreme, but you did say you were including green issues in your manifesto. No-one can ignore them these days.

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Hilary: Oh, the council send their recycling lorries round for Heaven's sake. We've got so many different coloured bins outside our house it looks like a playgroup! What more do people want? They'd have to stop having new Smallbone kitchens and bathrooms every couple of years.

Bernard: Yes, they would. I get quite depressed when I walk around, and see the contents of skips on their drives. Easy come, easy go. Why do they have to scrape their houses out all the time to copy some photo in a magazine? What's the matter with appreciating what they've got? I mean where does all that stuff go?

Hilary: Landfill I expect. Look, if people recycle little things; newspapers, asparagus tins, champagne bottles, then they feel they're doing their bit for

the environment; tick their moral box. To be green, they'd have to give things up. Seriously give things up. Voters wouldn't like it. Who wants to go back to being a cave man?

Bernard: They didn't damage the earth like we do.

Hilary: Bernard, I didn't hire you to be a green ambassador. I hired you to be my political agent.

Bernard: Well you should fire me then, because I think I'm turning green.

Hilary: What? Now? With a general election upon us?

Bernard: Yes. I'm sorry. I just wish there was a Green Candidate to make you sit up.

Hilary: Bernard, I think you're just having a mid-life crisis. You've been my political agent for ten years. If I throw in composting will you stay?

Bernard: **(Sighs)** Add recharging points for electric cars, and I'm yours.

Hilary: **(Brusquely)** Crime is my priority, but I'll mention them.

Bernard: I'll hold you to that.

(Hilary exits with her folder, muttering. Bernard exits with his papers, looking thoughtful. Lights off.)

Scene 2

(Lights rise. Pauline Payne enters with crocheted throw, a couple of small bins, and an election leaflet. Clatters bins down and places throw on back of a chair. Reads election leaflet. Snorts. Chucks it in bin marked 'recycling'. SFX. Doorbell rings, or a knock at door. Loud barking. Pauline exits)

Pauline: **(Offstage)** Go in the kitchen. Go on. Do as you're told.

(Pauline re-enters with Belle Booth. Belle is carrying a large handbag or wearing a shoulder bag)

Belle: Thank you. It's good of you to let me in. Everyone else in the street has closed the door in my face.

(Pauline gets a leaflet out of her bag and gives to Pauline)

Pauline: **(Takes leaflet and waves it at Belle)** I'll tell you why. We've lost faith in politicians. They don't listen to us, so we don't listen to them. You're a new face, tell me again which party you're with; not that you've got a cat's chance in hell of getting in. Sit down.

(Belle goes to sit)

Pauline: No that's the dog's chair. We have boundaries. **(Indicates another chair).**

Belle: Yes, you have to have clear boundaries with dogs don't you.

Pauline: I'm talking about people.

Belle: Oh, yes, of course, this other chair will be fine. **(Wipes hairs off it and sits)** I'm Belle Booth, Green candidate for Smallbury in the coming elections Mrs Er – **(Stands up again and proffers hand)**

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Pauline: **(Rejects Belle's outstretched hand)** I'm not Mrs Er, I'm Miss Pauline Payne. And that's not a Ms by the way. Silly word Ms; sounds like a buzzing mosquito. Sit down.

Belle: **(Sits again)** Would you like me to call you Pauline or Miss Payne?

Pauline: Why should you call me Pauline? I've only just let you through the door.

Belle: Oh, um,

Pauline: Well what can you do for us?

Belle: **(In a burst)** We can make your life greener.

Pauline: **(Sarcastically)** Can you.

Belle: We have very strong ideas. Picking at the edges won't do, we need to get to the heart of the problem.

Pauline: And how do you intend to do that? Answer without waffling. I've had enough of waffle. **(Waves leaflet again)**

Belle: More recycling for a start. Recycle the waste that passengers leave on trains, platforms and buses. More town centre recycling. Make industry more responsible. Encourage recycling in schools.

Pauline: We need to buy less. Repair, not replace!

Belle: That's difficult; business will suffer – the economy. That won't make us popular.

Pauline: Hard cheese. It's the economy or the earth.

Belle: Well that needs discussing. We will at least try. Make it illegal for parked cars to leave their engines running. More local employment will save road miles.

Pauline: We need to get rid of cars.

Belle: That's a bit extreme.

Pauline: Dog carts, or walk.

Belle: Um, perhaps that's something to bear in mind when the world runs out of oil.

Pauline: The sooner the better as far as I'm concerned. But we do need more employment round here. People pinch things because they haven't got an income.

Belle: An industrial unit would be useful; we would encourage start-up businesses.

Pauline: Crime issues are the vote winners with the Country Living lot. Hilary Husting knows that, and she'll win. Green issues aren't, and you'll lose; people think Green's 'wiffley.'

Belle: Perhaps we could call it Crime with a Twist? Or how about Green Anti-Crime? I'm thinking on my feet here.

Pauline: Feet are good, although I've got painful arthritis in mine. Protest marches are heavy on the feet, and I've been on a few. Carry on.

Belle: Footpaths. Um, improved bus and rail links. Oh, cycle paths. Local jobs.

Pauline: Where does this Green Anti-Crime come in?

Belle: Well, it would be finding jobs for people in the countryside, to cut crime, and to save the countryside into the bargain. Dual purpose.

Pauline: What kind of jobs?

Belle: I could talk to the farmers, and er, see if we could introduce local outlets for their milk, eggs, cheese, meat, fruit, etcetera. And bring back traditional crafts, cheese making, basket making. And more local manual labour, hedge laying, digging and ditching, to help prevent flooding.

Pauline: Tree planting and re-instating hedges.

Belle: Yes, yes. To capture pollutants. I notice you have a fine yew hedge.

Pauline: Birds know to spit the seeds out.

Belle: Cleverer than us.

Pauline: I wouldn't chew them personally.

Belle: We need to turn the tide.

Pauline: The tide's filthy. Make me your Political Agent and I'll help you.

Belle: Oh, but we can't do it just like that Mrs, er Miss Payne! The agent is employed by the Party. We're just dipping our toe in the water in Smallbury.

Pauline: You won't get in without me.

Belle: What could you do?

Pauline: Lots. I can talk to the people round here for a start.

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Belle: They'd listen to what you said?

Pauline: Yes.

Belle: -- You mean if you advised them to vote for me, they would?

Pauline: Oh yes.

Belle: Well, that would be nice, but it won't get me in will it? The residents of Dingwell only form a small percentage of Smallbury.

Pauline: I'd tell them to vote for Hilary.

Belle: What!

Pauline: It will put the other lot off.

Belle: But why should it put the majority off?

Pauline: They won't want to be seen doing anything the same as the Dingwell lot. They'd rather turn Green.

Belle: That's an interesting proposal. I guess could put you onto my expenses as my grass roots assistant. After all I'm saving them money by taking the bus, and packing sandwiches every day; in a paper bag of course.

Pauline: Use a sheet of newspaper. Why spoil a perfectly good paper bag? Recycling itself is a chemical process.

Belle: Well I do re-use the paper bag, although pilchard sandwiches are difficult – but I'll bear that in mind. - And you think your suggestion will work?

Pauline: Oh yes. I want to see this area green.

Belle: Well, that would be marvellous. So crafty! Vote for Hilary to put the majority off! So you'll go and door-knock?

Pauline: Yes. I need new soles for my boots. I want an advance on my pay.

Belle: Oh, er, of course, will £30 cover it?

Pauline: I can tell you've more money than sense. A tenner will cover it. I buy leather soles and hammer them on myself. Rubber is full of pollutants. I need to get hold of a load of Hilary Husting's leaflets.

Belle: Haven't they already been delivered?

Pauline: They chuck them in the bin straight away round here. You hear the bin lids flapping up and down the road. And I'm not talking recycling bins. Recycling to them means stripping a pinched bicycle down to its parts to sell on.

Belle: Oh dear. **(Looks at Pauline's recycling bin with papers sticking out)** Well I can tell that you're a big recycler.

Pauline: I recycle for other people as well. They can't be bothered. I collect the old folks' medicine bottles because they pour the remnants down the drains, or chuck them in the bin. I decant them into one big bottle. Medicines like morphine are very bad for fish life. I recycle the glass. I wish the chemists would re-use the bottles, and use more glass. It's all plastic, plastic, plastic these days. And I hope you realise your pilchard has probably swallowed a load of plastic too, that you're now eating?

Belle: Wait a minute – did I hear you say morphine? Oh, dear me, you shouldn't be handling Class A drugs! Let me return that big bottle to the chemist. I'll speak to them about ways of getting unfinished Class A drugs back in. I don't want you arrested for handling. The police are very vigilant about these things.

Pauline: I've done it for years. It's not a problem. Don't fuss!

Belle: If you're helping the Greens, you need to be whiter than white yourself. We need our wits about us to deal with Hilary.

(Pauline sighs heavily and tuts then exits and returns with small brown bottle. She hands it to Belle)

Belle: I thought you said you decanted them in a big bottle?

Pauline: Oh, that one's gone. Don't take any notice of the label. I use anything.

Belle: **(Puts bottle in her bag unread, and prepares to leave)** I'll be in touch soon. I'm so glad we're on side.

Pauline: **(Snorts. Grumpy)** Stupid expression. It's not a game of football. I'll see you out. The dog's in the hall, don't look her in the eye.

Belle: Why not?

Pauline: She sees it as a challenge.

(Pauline and Belle exit with their props. Lights off.)

Scene 3

(Bernard Enters with clutch of papers. Sarah enters with a notepad and pen.)

Sarah: Hello Bernard. I saw your car in the car park, and thought I'd pop in to see whether you've got a date for the husting? It's good to see there's a challenger this time.

Bernard: Aren't journalists supposed to be neutral Sarah?

Sarah: Yes, but it's boring copy to only have one candidate. How's Hilary taking the opposition?

Bernard: Hilary has her own manifesto. She works hard for the constituency, and she's hoping to serve them for another term.

Sarah: Always the diplomat Bernard.

Bernard: That's what I'm paid for Sarah.

Sarah: Off the cuff?

Bernard: I've learned there's no *off the cuff* with journalists.

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Sarah: You're close to Hilary aren't you Bernard? I sometimes wonder why we never see Pauline's husband, Mr Husting very often.

Bernard: Mr Husting works in the City.

Sarah: There's a train service.

Hilary: And your wife keeps a very low profile.

Bernard: My wife is shy. Sarah, you don't work for a Sunday tabloid. Just stick to the election campaign in the Smallbury Advertiser.

Sarah: The Smallbury Motel.

Bernard: It's just closed. What of it?

Sarah: I glanced through the visitor book out of interest.

Bernard: You must be very bored. I'll loan you my telephone directory if you like.

Sarah: 2014. You and Hilary stayed there.

Bernard: Is there a law against it? We work all over the place.

Sarah: That must include the bedroom, because you only booked one room overnight.

Bernard: We work all hours. Approaching the election it's all go.

Sarah: Oh yes, I can imagine. It was the night she won the election. You were both married. If you don't give me something Bernard, I shall pursue this. You didn't sign your real names, but you have a very distinctive hand, it stood out a mile.

Bernard: This is blackmail Sarah. Why should the voters care what we did or didn't ten years ago?

Sarah: Journalism is a cut-throat industry Bernard. Newspapers are like pubs, going to the wall all the time. Readers are bored of reading about crime. They want something they can feel about. A bit of sleaze never hurt anyone. Now give.

Bernard: **(Upset)** What do you mean it never hurt anyone? It was a long time ago, and it would hurt my wife, and it would hurt Hilary's husband. And it would damage our campaign.

Sarah: You'd better come up with something then. The ball's in your court as they say.

Bernard: I haven't got anything Sarah. I lead a very dull life.

Sarah: **(Threateningly)** You'd better *find* something then, or I'll write an expose of your post-election shenanigans. You've no idea how hard it is to find copy.

(Sarah exits. Bernard, worried, shuffles papers as if about to exit. SFX. Knock at door. Pauline marches in.)

Pauline: I saw your car.

Bernard: **(Distracted)** Oh .. er .. Pauline! I was um just going.

Pauline: I want some leaflets. Hilary's leaflets.

Bernard: **(Puzzled)** You're going to distribute them for us are you Pauline?

Pauline: Yes.

Bernard: Really? Not the Green Party?

Pauline: Too wiffley.

Bernard: I beg your pardon?

Pauline: You heard. We need a strong candidate to tackle all this crime. I daren't even leave my boots outside these days. The Dingwell residents feel the same.

Bernard: What! The Dingwell lot, I mean the Dingwell residents, are complaining about crime?

Pauline: I've said it once.

Bernard: But we've delivered the leaflets already surely?

Pauline: In the bins. I'm going to persuade them where their interests lie.

Bernard: And um, their interests lie in voting for Hilary and not the Green Party?

Pauline: Don't ask me to repeat myself. I'm not a politician.

Bernard: Oh, er, of course, right, very well, thank you, that's marvellous. Hilary will be over the moon. I've got a boxful in my car.

Pauline: I want more than a boxful.

Bernard: Do you? Marvellous! Do you want to come and get them?

Pauline: Well they're not going to walk in by themselves are they?

Bernard: No, no, of course not. My car's just outside.

Pauline: I'm sure it is. Too lazy to walk.

(Pauline exits. Bernard bites tongue. Exits)

Bernard: **(Offstage)** Here – let me get the door. Oh, sorry, of course not.

(Lights off)

Scene 4

(Lights up. Belle enters with her folder. Looks around hopefully. Disappointed she moves to leave)

Sarah: **(Enters)** Hello. Belle Booth?

Belle: Yes?

Sarah: **(Extends arm to shake hands)** Sarah Scoop, Smallbury Advertiser.

Belle: **(Shakes Sarah's hand)** Oh hello. I recognise you from your photo in the paper. Wonderful source of local news. I was hoping to catch Bernard Blatherwick, but I must have just missed him.

Sarah: He left a few minutes ago. I've been sitting in my car writing up a few notes. While you're here, can I ask why the Greens are trying for Smallbury? Hilary Husting has been MP here for ten years, and she has a large following of loyal voters.

Belle: Sure. We're trying for the Smallbury seat because the countryside is where we should be trying to stop the rot. Has Hilary ever mentioned Green issues? No! Yet here we are in the middle of the most beautiful countryside. Smallbury doesn't even have a recycling bin in the main street! Recycling from homes is minimal. Do you know that one resident even has to collect their old medicines and glass. Now look at this. **(Rummages in bag and lifts out the brown bottle given to her by Pauline. She does not look at label.)** Morphine. Left over in some of the bottles. It's shocking. Contents straight down the drain, or in the bin. **(Shakes bottle and laughs.)** I could make a fortune on the black market!

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Sarah: That is shocking, I agree! I'll take a photo. **(Takes a small camera from her bag)**

Belle: Where would you like me to stand?

Sarah: Just there. If you hold the bottle up. **(Moves here and there taking shots from various angles. Lastly goes for a close up of the bottle)**

Belle: **(Happily)** Anything to strengthen the Green cause. **(Returns bottle to her bag.)**

Hilary: **(Enters)** What's this about the Green cause? I hope you're going to take my photo as well Sarah. The Smallbury Advertiser doesn't want to appear biased does it?

Sarah: Of course I will, Hilary. I'm trying to remember if you have a best side **(pause)** for your photo.

Hilary: They're both my best sides Sarah. Wait until I'm smiling.
(Sarah takes photos while Hilary poses here and there)

Hilary: What's this I hear about a Black Market?

Belle: **(Takes bottle from her bag and shows Hilary)** Morphine. Because there's no glass recycling, or education on what to do with old medicines, people are pouring it down their drains. Some unsavoury character could easily flog it on the black market. Just think about fish life Hilary.

Hilary: Oh, I often think about pond life Belle. And I'd say it's an offence to be handling morphine so casually. Who does it belong to? How have you got hold of it? The very idea of walking around the village hall with someone else's morphine! **(takes out her mobile phone.)** This is Hilary Husting, I need a drugs officer to come straight away to the village hall. I'm detaining Belle Booth under my power of Citizen's Arrest.

(SFX. lights go down. All exit)

Scene 5

(Lights up)

Bernard: (Enters holding newspaper and speaking.) It isn't the best headline we've ever had.

Hilary: (Enters with her briefcase) The stupid woman. It was a trap.

Bernard: (Reads from paper) 'Drug haul turns out to be constipation medicine. MP Hilary Husting had a red face, when after detaining Green candidate Belle Booth under Citizen's Arrest, the liquid assumed to be morphine, turned out to be a laxative. Hilary told the Smallbury Advertiser that Belle Booth had informed her that it was a bottle of morphine. Belle Booth in her reply stated she had been reliably informed that it was, and was returning it to the chemist to be recycled. She added that she was determined to get to the bottom of the matter about the mix up. This paper wonders if a motion will be presented to government.'

Hilary: I think I come out of it better than Belle Booth. It shows I'm hard on drugs.

Bernard: You've scored a point, but she's scored two by pointing out there's no glass recycling, or advice on what goes down our drains. Did you notice the label on the bottle by the way?

Hilary: What, Dulcolax?

Bernard: No, the name on the bottle. Pauline Payne.

Hilary: Wouldn't you know it! My nemesis!

Bernard: Oh, I hope not. You can only see it on the photo if you look closely. I've seen her taking little swigs at a bottle, and always assumed it was booze, but perhaps it's laxative?

Hilary: She must be extremely constipated. But why tell Belle it was morphine?

Bernard: Perhaps she was making a recycling point? It's less dramatic for the old dears of Smallbury to be pouring Dulcolax down their drains, than morphine.

Hilary: Well she's welcome to Pauline Payne. They're made for each other.

Bernard: I'd have thought so, but she says voting for you. What's more she's persuading the residents of Dingwell to do the same.

Hilary: You're joking!

Bernard: She came in the other day for your leaflets to distribute. Apparently the first lot went in their bins.

Hilary: But Pauline's as Green as an avocado! Why give Belle Booth that bottle to make a recycling point, and then want to help me?

Bernard: She did say the residents of Dingwell were fed up with things getting nicked. It's probably a sign she wants you to take green issues seriously.

Hilary: You never give up do you Bernard! Anyway, her vote and the votes of the whole of Dingwell, don't add up to a handful of soya beans.

Bernard: Hilary – this is a bit sensitive. Remember that night, that post-election night ten years ago; we were both drunk – the Smallbury Motel?

Hilary: Is this leading somewhere?

Bernard: I'm afraid it is. Sarah Scoop has found out. You know what she's like; desperate to be head hunted for 'The Daily Sport'.

Hilary: You weren't stupid enough to use our real names?

Bernard: She recognised my handwriting in the old records. She must have been poking around looking for a story.

Hilary: Oh God. What does she want? Money?

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Bernard: No, she wants a scoop. She says unless I give her a lead, she'll write an exposé – political sex scandal blazoned across the Smallbury Advertiser.

Hilary: But that's ridiculous! From what I remember, you were so drunk you fell asleep and snored.

Bernard: Did I?

Hilary: Probably. I'd had one or two. Oh, I could kill the stupid woman. She's out to wreck my campaign. After the morphine fiasco, this would finish me off. And Gerald is probably waiting for something like this to divorce me.

Bernard: Oh, I'm sorry.

Hilary: Oh, he's got a bimbo in London somewhere. That's why I hardly see him. We keep up for appearances sake. What about your wife?

Bernard: I'd do anything to avoid upsetting her. We were going through a sticky patch at the time of the Smallbury Motel.

Hilary: Well never mind that; if it comes out what are my voters going to think?

Bernard: Well, the Smallbone Kitchen lot might applaud. They're big Jilly Cooper readers.

Hilary: Bernard I do not want to be compared with a character in 'Riders'! And you're not exactly a stud!

Bernard: Thank you. Any suggestions?

Hilary: If we use our brains, we can come up with something to damage Belle Booth. You're my political agent – you come up with something!

Bernard: We could tell her, er. I know, we could tell her that Pauline Payne has seen the light, and is voting for you, not Green, and is advising the whole of Dingwell to do the same. It will make a nice story. Say how the residents of Dingwell don't usually turn out to vote, but they're fed up with crime.

Hilary: It's not exactly a bodice ripper is it? It will have to do for now. Let me know if she's not satisfied. I'll think of a way of fixing her. Anyway, as I

say, the Dingwell votes don't add up to a handful of haricot beans. I'd better go and do some door knocking. Smooth things over.

Bernard:

Smallbone kitchens? Better keep off the Easy Pomegranate Margaritas.

(Bernard exits followed by Hilary)

Scene 6

(Lights up. Belle and Sarah enter)

- Belle:** You didn't have to splash the story all over the headlines!
- Sarah:** Green candidate arrested for drug possession? Come on, get real. What self-respecting journalist could ignore that? What was it like, being in prison?
- Belle:** **(Making notes)** It was dreadful. I was detained all night. I didn't sleep a wink. The laboratory didn't get the results back until the next morning.
- Sarah:** I've got a note here that you don't actually live in the constituency.
- Belle:** I've got a flat.
- Sarah:** Rented.
- Belle:** Yes, what of it?
- Sarah:** It doesn't really show commitment.
- Belle:** I will be moving to Smallbury, naturally.
- Sarah:** If you get in.
- Belle:** Of course.
- Sarah:** And if you don't?
- Belle:** Well, er ..
- Sarah:** Will you try another constituency next time? You tried to get in at Greenford at the last election.

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- Belle:** You seem to have been investigating me. It's not a secret.
- Sarah:** You lost your deposit.
- Belle:** This isn't helpful. I'd be pleased if you didn't make a thing of it in the press. I am the chosen candidate for this constituency. Mindfulness.
- Sarah:** Were you charged?
- Belle:** What?
- Sarah:** For drug possession yesterday? If you were charged, I don't think you'd be eligible to stand. You can't have a criminal record.
- Belle:** No, I wasn't. And I don't have a criminal record! Please, don't make something of nothing.
- Sarah:** But you do have a criminal record, don't you? You've been charged with common assault in the past, haven't you?

Belle: (**Thinks. Bursts out**) But that was years ago! I was young. I joined a demonstration against an ancient tree being felled. I knocked the policeman's hat off, that's all. He wasn't hurt.

Sarah: He didn't like it. You were charged.

Belle: They wanted to make an example of someone. And they chose me, because I had political ambition. Look, this is not in the public interest. It was a long time ago, and it doesn't do anyone any good to rake it up.

Sarah: Well, that depends upon what other copy I can get hold of for my deadline doesn't it? What do you think about Hilary calling in the police?

Belle: (**Quickly latches onto change of subject**) It was ridiculous; it was malicious. It shows how much she's afraid of competition. Voters should be careful of voting for someone who'll resort to low tricks like that. I mean what does that say about her character? Oh, I'm itching to get at her at the hustings, and asking a few questions.

Sarah: Why do you think Pauline Payne told you it was morphine in the bottle?

Belle: I really don't know. I took her word for it.

Sarah: Isn't that naïve?

Belle: (**Defensive**) I'm a trusting person. Anyway, whatever it was, it's being poured down our drains. There needs to be a more stringent way of monitoring medicines. Chemists need to take responsibility to check if a patient has finished a Class A drug, or strong analgesics, and collect them in. Think about the effect on the oceans.

Sarah: Hmm, that's a strong campaign we can start in the Smallbury Advertiser. I'll get a photo of Pauline Payne. Get her to pose holding one of her bottles. She lives in Dingwell doesn't she? I saw her distributing leaflets for you the other day. Don't you think it's a bit odd, pulling a trick like that on you, if she's a Green?

Belle: It was a harmless mistake I'm sure. If she's collecting all sorts of gunk from the neighbours, she won't know what's in a particular lot will she? And you're wrong about the leaflets, Pauline's supporting Hilary.

Sarah: (**Making notes all the time**) Really? That's interesting. Very interesting. I would have thought she was as green as a cucumber.

Belle: You might have thought so. Dingwell don't get the chance to get rid of Hilary every day. She does nothing for them. No work opportunities, training. I can offer so much more.

Sarah: (**Thoughtful**) I wonder what Pauline Payne is playing at? Hmm, we may not have to run your assault charge just yet. Just keep me informed of news.

Belle: Is this blackmail?

Sarah: Not at all. *Quid pro quo* and all that.

(Sarah closes her notebooks and exits. Belle exits, worried. Lights off.)

Scene 7

(Lights rise. Pauline enters with her props. SFX. Doorbell. Dog barking. Pauline exits.)

Pauline: **(Off stage)** Go in the kitchen; go on; in your basket. **(Enters. Cross)** I asked you not to fuss about it!

(Belle enters with her bag.)

Belle: **(Apologetically)** Pauline, I'm sorry the newspaper made so much of it.

Pauline: It was embarrassing for me.

Belle: I'm sorry. It was Hilary's fault. And spending a night in jail was embarrassing for me, not to mention uncomfortable.

Pauline: You shouldn't have showed the bottle to Sarah Snoop.

Belle: Scoop.

Pauline: You know what journalists are like. She's been round here, poking and prying with her little notebook.

Belle: I thought showing her the medicine would be helpful. After all, you exposed a big crack in the cistern, **(corrects self)** sorry, the system. As it turned out, it was just bog-standard stuff; I mean just ordinary stuff. Why did you tell me it was morphine?

Pauline: I was exaggerating.

Belle: You didn't need to do that Pauline. Pouring any medicines down the drain is unhelpful to the environment. Anyway, Sarah Scoop says she's going to run a big campaign.

Pauline: A big campaign?

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Belle: Bang the drum about unused medicines and recycling. She's good at banging drums. - So that's a positive to come out of it isn't it?

Pauline: **(Silent for a second, then very cross)** Politicians come in, take over, and make a big noise for the sake of their egos. Everything was going just fine until you started fussing.

Belle: Oh Pauline, it wasn't like that. Newspapers have a part to play in raising awareness of green issues. **(Ruefully)** Mind you, that woman takes things too far, sticking her nose into things that happened long ago; total irrelevancies, and making mountains out of mole-hills. She'll come a cropper one day!

Pauline: Something in your past?

Belle: Oh, a youthful folly. It was nothing much; ridiculous. The medicine campaign will give her something to get her teeth into, for a while. Anyway, I've got good news; she's actually dropped something useful into our laps.

Pauline: Oh?

Belle: **(Takes a newspaper from bag)** Have you read the newspaper?

Pauline: **(Looks at newspaper in Belle's hand. Sarcastically)** Not unless I've got X-ray eyes.

Belle: I'll read it to you. **(Reads from newspaper)** 'Commie delivers Hilary's leaflets. Today this paper asks whether Independent Hilary Husting is turning pink, after Red supporter, Pauline Payne was spotted delivering leaflets supporting Mrs Husting. Residents of the select Kensington Mews in Smallbury expressed their shock, saying it was like having a mole in their midst, and it was making them think again about whose name to put a tick against. When questioned one said it might not be so bad being Green once one had got used to it, and they were training their *au pair* to rinse out the royal beluga caviar tins. Hilary Husting is said to be furious with her agent Bernard Blatherwick, who has now been sacked.' **(Pauses)** Actually, I didn't know you were a communist Pauline, but I don't think the Greens will mind. My land is your land, your land is my land, sort of thing.

Pauline: So the Greens might get in?

Belle: Thanks to you, there's more hope. I'll do my best at the husting. Bernard managed to sort it out, hire the village hall etcetera, before Hilary fired him. Shame, he seemed like a nice man.

(Lights off. Tabs close.)

INTERVAL

Act 2

Scene 1

(Lights up. Stage is set with a long table or two small tables set together, with 5 chairs behind for cast to sit. The audience must be able to see perfectly. The plastic glasses must be coloured or opaque. Pauline enters with large bag and a bin. She puts bin in corner. Sits. Rummages in bag and retrieves notepad with recycled paper stapled together. Puts on table. Bernard enters with papers. Sits.)

Bernard: **(To Pauline)** You're early. **(Looks at her large bag and bin)** You know Pauline, I could have given you a lift with all your luggage.

(Sarah enters with notebook. Sits. Gets out her notepad)

Pauline: The only lift I'd accept is a piggyback.

Bernard: **(Laughs)** Well um I'm not sure if my back would er, not meaning that -

Sarah: Oh I'm sure your back would be just fine Bernard.

(Bernard bites his lip and stays silent)

Sarah: I put the husting in the Smallbury Advertiser. The public should start arriving soon. I hope they're going to ask some searching questions.

Bernard: **(Tersely)** Quite.

Sarah: **(Looks at bin disparagingly)** You didn't need to bring your own bin Pauline. I'm sure the village hall can run to a bin?

Pauline: I don't see a recycling bin in here – do you? That's a typical empty statement that journalists make. **(Glares at Sarah's notebook)** Is that notebook recycled paper?

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(Sarah ignores the question. Hilary enters side by side with Belle. Hilary pushes Belle aside and enters first. She carries a briefcase or folder. Sits. Belle follows with large folder. Sits at table.)

Hilary: **(Accusingly to Bernard)** Why are you here?

Bernard: I set the husting up. I have an interest in the election.

Hilary: **(Huffily)** Just so long as you're not representing me.

Bernard: I wouldn't dream of it.

Hilary: **(To Pauline)** Why are you here? You should be sitting with the audience.

Bernard: I invited Pauline on the panel as a member of the general public.

Hilary: I should have been consulted.

Bernard: I could hardly consult you after you'd fired me.

Hilary: **(To Pauline)** I want to make it clear that I do not want your support and I do not need your support. I am not a fan of communism, however latent. Bernard should not have given you my leaflets to distribute in my heartland. If the residents of Dingwell want to vote for me they're very welcome, but you are not my advocate.

Pauline: Your political agent was over the moon.

Hilary: Bernard wasn't aware that you were a communist. **(To Sarah)** You can stick that in your little notebook.

Sarah: I write what I see.

Hilary: Just be aware that I play golf with your editor.

Sarah: **(Sarcastically)** Oh yes, she mentioned your swing.

Belle: **(Fans herself with a piece of paper)** It's sweltering in here. Goodness knows how long the heating's been on! Doesn't anyone worry about global warming?

Bernard: The caretaker was in this morning. He must have set it at what he thought was comfort level.

Sarah: Is he Brazilian?

Belle: Could we have glasses of water please Bernard. My throat feels quite dry. It must be all the talking I've been doing.

Hilary: **(Sharply to Bernard)** They should have been on the table already if you set up!

Bernard: **(Replies to Hilary)** There's a sign on the taps not to use them; probably a leak. There's a large bottle of still water on the side. I daresay the caretaker left it. Glasses are in the cupboard. I don't think glasses of water are within my remit now.

Sarah: **(Stands up)** Oh I'll get them. Do you all want water?

Hilary: I'll get my own. I don't want any more headlines about nothing.
(Hilary stands up and exits)

Belle: I'll get my own too, thanks.
(Belle stands up and exits)

Sarah: Charming! **(To Pauline)** Water?

Pauline: I'll go. I want to make sure the plastic's recycled.
(Pauline exits)

Bernard: **(Folds arms)** I can do without.
(Sarah looks exasperated and exits. Hilary returns with glass of water and sits. Belle returns with glass of water and sits. Sarah, after a slight pause, returns with glass of water and sits.)

Belle: **(Sips from glass)** This water tastes a bit funny.

Bernard: It's spring water with something or other in it; elderflower, apple?

Sarah: (Sips) Passion fruit?

(Hilary and Bernard both look at Sarah nervously, at each other briefly, then deliberately away. Sarah smiles a little and sips again/ Pauline returns with glass of water. Sips and sits)

Pauline: Would you believe they even have plastic glasses in the village hall! What's wrong with glass glasses?

Bernard: No glass glasses? There used to be some in the cupboard. Perhaps it's a health and safety thing?

Pauline: What next, plastic knives and forks, plastic plates, in case someone takes a bite out of one!

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Belle: (Picks up her tumbler) They look like Ikea tumblers to me. Maybe the village hall is having a kitchen refurb, and someone brought in a pack of 6?

Hilary: They've probably been nicked. It's what I keep saying, unless you lock everything up, they walk. It's crime with a capital C.

Belle: It's also greenhouse gases with a capital G.

Bernard: (Looks around room) The public have arrived now. If no-one else has anything beginning with a capital letter shall we make a start? I'll say a brief welcome if you like.

Hilary: I'll introduce myself thank you. (Sips water. Stands up. To audience) Good evening, for those who don't know me, I'm Hilary Husting. As you know I've been your MP for Smallbury for two terms, and I'm asking you to put your trust in me again. As you know - (interrupted by Belle)

Belle: Shouldn't I introduce myself now?

Hilary: I was always taught it was rude to interrupt, but if you can't manage to wait, go ahead. (Sits)

Belle: (Sips water. Stands - To audience) Good evening and thank you for coming. I'm Belle Booth, your Green candidate, and I very much hope that you'll vote for me, and we can work together to - (interrupted by Hilary)

Hilary: (Falsely pleasant) You've introduced yourself. It's back to me I believe. I suggest we talk for around a minute each, and then take questions.

Bernard: Just long enough to boil a third of an egg.

(Belle sits)

Hilary: (Glares at him, then stands and smiles at audience) I should like to confirm here and now that I am an Independent. (Looks at Sarah Scoop) I have no association with any other party, despite what has been insinuated in the press recently. Crime is my priority. It's the scourge of civilised

society – but of course one cannot ignore green issues today. So, get your *au pairs* to give your champers bottles a quick swill and take them to the bottle bank, and you'll be doing your bit for the earth. To my mind greenhouse gas is what's being produced by other parties. Vote for me, and I'll never ever ask you to rinse out a dog food tin in your Eclectica Chateaux Copper kitchen sinks. **(Smiles graciously and sits)**

(SFX. Audience applause)

Belle: **(Stands)** My response is that the earth belongs to us all, and we all need to work together to keep it in good health. As a Green, I'm the woman to guide you through the thorny issues of renewal and sustainability. Together, as the song goes 'We Can Work It Out'. Vote for me, and you'll be voting for your grandchildren's inheritance – the earth. Naturally, I'll be looking at crime as well and of ways of cutting crime by using the land and the skills that we have. We live in a beautiful part of the world –

Sarah: Rented flat.

Belle: - and no matter what our accommodation, we need jobs to keep our little world free of crime, and peopling the landscape. I will work towards a wonderful scheme called

(Hilary interrupts)

Hilary: One minute.

(Belle looks at watch. Opens mouth. Closes it. Smiles. Sits. SFX. Audience applause)

Bernard: **(Stands)** Shall we open the floor to questions. Unless our press representative has one first?

Sarah: **(Stands)** I certainly do. The Smallbury Advertiser **(To audience)** is trusted to bring you all the local news. We don't make things up, but we dig, and when we dig, we sometimes come up with some interesting things, that you as the public, as voters have a right to know about the people you're being asked to vote for, for instance **(sips water. Sways a little. Holds hand to head. Sips water again, and collapses onto chair. Slumps onto table)**

Hilary: The news, whatever it is, is obviously too much for her.

Belle: **(Stands and waves a paper in front of Sarah's face)** Give her some air. She must have fainted. It's ridiculously hot in here. Perhaps she's dehydrated. **(Grabs Sarah's glass and offers her a drink)** Sarah, have a drink. **(To others)** She's not drinking.

Bernard: **(Stands up. Takes Sarah's neck pulse. Dramatically)** Is there a doctor in this house? Actually, it's too late. I think she's dead!

(Cast all freeze on spot for a few seconds.)

Monsieur Poirot: If that is the case, then what you need is a detective! Here was I at the hustings trying to decide whom to vote for, when something like this happens! Oh mon dieu, Madame Hilary is right, crime *is* everywhere!

(See notes for audience participation in solving crime)